C H U R C H N E W S

F R O M T H E N O R T H E R N C O U N T R I E S

Edited by the Northern Ecumenical Institute

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Northern Seamen's Church Council Established.

At a meeting in Copenhagen in which the secretaries and other representatives from the seamen's missions in Scandinavia took part a Northern Seamen's Church Council was established. Proposals for establishing such a council were originally put forward by the Swedes and won approval from the other Northern countries at last year's meeting of the secretaries in Helsinki (Helsingfors).

The Swedish secretary, Dr. Axel Ylander, was elected chairman of the Northern Council and the Secretary General of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission, Mr. Kaare Støylen, was appointed secretary. The Council consists of a secretary and a board member from each of the Northern countries and its task is to extend co-operation between the organizations in a number of fields. At the meeting it was decided to publish a common Northern hymn-book for the sailors, as many mission stations in various quarters of the world are visited by seamen from all the Northern countries.

Representatives of the seamen's churches also had the opportunity of meeting representatives of the Northern welfare councils for the merchant fleets and discussing the question of extending the welfare institutions for Northern seamen in East Asian ports.

DENMARK

Danish King Takes Part in Church Service.

At the recent dedication of the new Danish church in

Paris King Frederik took active part in the church service, a unique event in the history of the Danish Church and in the history of the Danish royal family. It is usual at the dedication of a church to have portions of Scripture read aloud by four clergymen, but as one of these, the former Minister of Church Affairs, the Rev. Carl Hermansen, had been prevented from attending, the chairman of Dansk Kirke i Udlandet (The Danish Church in Foreign Lands), Bishop C.W. Noack, asked the King to take Dean Hermansen's place. The King consented and read the first of the four passages.

The Danish Christian daily "Kristeligt Dagblad" wrote as follows: "We wish to express our gratitude that such a thing is possible. At a time when many forces are opposed to the Church, our King has given an example that will not soon be forgotten. The history of the relationship between the Royal Family and the Danish people has been enriched with an incident that is worthy of being added to the many other good memories that are specially treasured by some people."

Churches Give Common Opinion on Abortion Laws.

The institution called "Kristen Hjælp" (Christian Help), which is a central social organ for all the National Church organizations in Denmark, has sent an address to the Parliamentary committee working on the formulation of new abortion laws. The statement expresses the Church's point of view, that abortion should only be legal for medical, ethical (race), and eugenic (seriously defective children) reasons. It protests against inducing abortion on other grounds, recommending that social aid be given to the women instead so that they can complete their pregnancy. A similar protest was made against the formulation of a bill introduced by the Ministry of Justice, according to which abortion is permitted in cases of women who are "not suited to take care of a child" because of serious physical or mental defects - it is feared that a rule of this sort will lead to abortions in cases where it is not necessary. Contraceptives are accepted as a weapon in the fight against abortion, but objections are raised to giving collective instruction in their use in schools.

It is suggested in the address that a representative of the Church e.g. a clergyman or a deaconess, who is to be nominated by the bishop of the diocese and appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, be attached to each Maternity Welfare Centre and to the General Council for Maternity Welfare.

Danish Mission Hospital in Syria About to be Closed?

The Danish Mission to the Near East in Syria has sent an appeal to the Syrian Government threatening to close the large mission hospital in Nebk, if the Government refuses to recognize the hospital's right to employ 3 doctors, 5 nurses, and 1 chemist, the Board's right to appoint one of the doctors as manager of the hospital and lastly to recognize the hospital's nursing school.

As early as last year the Mission to the Near East sent a delegation to Syria, and these demands were put forward as necessary to the stability of the hospital. The authorities

seemed to be favourably disposed, but so far none of the demands have been acceded to, and hence the missionaries have felt themselves obliged to put forward their demands in the form of an ultimatum.

Danish YMCA and YWCA Do Not Recommend Festival.

The joint boards of the YMCA and YWCA in Denmark have issued a public statement to the effect that they cannot recommend members to take part in the summer festival in Warsaw which has been arranged by the World Council of Democratic Youth.

The reason for this is that the Secretary General of the movement, the Rev. Orla Møller, has recommended that young people take part in the festival in an effort to relax the tension between East and West (cp. CN No. 3). This advice was not given by Mr. Orla Møller in his capacity of Secretary General for the YMCA and YWCA, says the statement.

FINLAND

Welfare Work A Central Funcion of Finnish Church Life.

In 1944 welfare work was recognized as a permanent and ordinary form of church work in the Finnish National Church, and rules regulating such work were incorporated in the Church laws. According to these each separate congregation is bound to employ a suitable number of welfare workers. These must have completed special training in accordance with a programme approved by the chapter.

At present there are 514 deaconesses in the Church's service taking care of 200.000 sick people and 100.000 other cases that need special care in various ways. More than 300 million Finnish marks a year are used for welfare work, and of these about 175 millions are obtained through Church taxes.

Vitally important are also the "town committees" set up for each congregation, whose task it is to render immediate help where it is necessary, to seek out the destitute, and to see that people get in touch with the institutions that are able to help them. Besides being the Church's outstretched hand to the destitute the town committees are also supposed to help collecting funds for the welfare work by means of work evenings, bazars, etc.

5 o/o Religious Broadcasts over Finland's Radio.

The Finnish Radio which - like other Northern Broadcasting Companies - is closely connected with the State, has in the last year used 5 o/o of its time for religious broadcasts. Most programmes of a religious nature are arranged by a special radio-committee appointed by "Forbundet for den finske Kirkes Menighedsarbejde" (the Council for the Finnish Church's Parish Work). In the course of the year 61 morning services have been broadcast as well as evening services on church festivals. 252 services of morning prayer have been broadcast. A number

of lectures on church history are held on the radio in honour of the 800 year jubilee of the Finnish Church.

A new type of evening religious programme is the so-called "Home Evenings with the Gospel", in which the microphone visits different homes, now a well-to-do home, now one that is not so well off, where family discussions are focused on Christian problems. It is also proposed to broadcast transmissions from the summer meetings of the big Finnish revivalist movements. A Gallup poll has shown that the religious programmes in the radio have a very large number of listeners. This is especially true of the morning prayer services which are believed to gather more than 1 million listeners - a surprising number in view of the fact that there are barely 1 million wireless sets in the country.

ICELAND

Celebration of the 900th Anniversary of First Icelandic Bishop.

In the summer of 1956 it will be 900 years since the first Icelandic bishop, Isleifur Gissurarson, was ordained. His episcopal residence was in Skalholt where he also established a school for the clergy.

Large celebrations have been planned for next summer to be held at this historic place. There is nothing left of former glories, but in celebration of the anniversary it has been planned to build a church at Skalholt in the Roman style so common 900 years ago. The drawings for the church have been completed, building is to start this summer and the church should be roofed over by winter, but it will not be possible to complete it by next summer. It has also been suggested in connection with the anniversary that the ordaining bishop of Skalholt diocese, who at present has his residence in Reykjavik, should move his residence to the old diocese.

The Well-known Sculptor, Einar Jónsson, Dies.

The great Icelandic sculptor, Professor Einar Jónsson, has died, and at his funeral from Reykjavik Cathedral at which the Bishop spoke a whole nation headed by the President al couple manifested their gratitude to him.

Einar Jónsson was a deeply religious personality and this attitude found expression in his art. From his last years we have a monument which at a distance looks like a cross, but on approaching one finds that it represents the silent angel of sorrow carrying a young woman in his arms. One of his most impressive pieces is a 3 meter tall statue of Christ, both sublime and human, majestic and tender, representing the Saviour at the moment when the Spirit in the shape of a dove comes to dedicate him to His calling. This figure now stands near the altar in the Hallgrim Church in Reykjavik.

NORWAY

3000 Refugees Living in Norway.

According to a recent estimate by Det norske Flygtningeraad (The Norwegian Refugee Council) about 3000 refugees from other countries have found homes and security in Norway. At the close of the War there were about 10.000 displaced persons in the country, but the majority of those were repatriated. Only 1400 wished to remain in Norway and these were granted asylum there. The 1600 other refugees who are to-day living in Norway have been helped by the Refugee Council in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Affairs to obtain entry permits.

10 o/o of the refugees are the so-called "hard-core" refugees, i.e. sick, old, and blind. The first 40 blind refugees arrived in 1950 and were installed in a special welfare home near Drammen. They were given their own social welfare worker with whom they discussed their plans for the future, and to-day nearly all of them have their own homes and support themselves by work they are able to do, mostly industrial jobs. In the years 1951-53 173 tuberculosis patients with their families arrived, in all some 300 people. The patients were at once given treatment in sanatoria and their families were helped to find homes and a chance to work. To-day 90 o/o of these patients have returned to their families and are supporting themselves. Finally 95 old refugees have been placed in various old people's homes.

160 Refugee Boys to Norway This Summer.

This month some 100 boys from various refugee camps in Germany will arrive in Norway at the invitation of the refugee welfare service under the Norwegian Youth League. They are all between the ages of 9 and 12 and are to live in private homes, each of which has offered to take them for three months. In July a group of 60 boys from 13 to 16 years old will arrive in Norway to stay for 5-6 weeks at the summer camp "Strandheim".

The fact that the invitations have been extended to boys has been received with great joy in the refugee camps as most of the invitations are for girls, and the boys need these vacations just as much.

Erection of King Håkon's Church in Copenhagen Assured.

The collection in Denmark and Norway of funds for the erection of a church to be built in commemoration of King Håkon's Golden Jubilee has not yet been concluded, but there is already a sufficie sum to ensure that the church will be built, some 1,8 million Norwegian crowns having been collected, 600.000 of which come from Denmark.

SWEDEN

Well-known Theologian Hints at Church Union in Sweden.

The well-known Swedish professor of theology, Gustaf Wingren, Lund, has written an article in the weekly paper "Vår Kyrka, issued by the National Church. The article deals with the ecumenical movement in Sweden and has attracted a good deal of attention because - without saying anything outright - it hints at the possibility of a future union between the National Church and several of the Free Churches. The article contains several critical reflections on the Free Churches as well as on the Lutheran National Church. Professor Wingren points out how serious a problem it is that the churches do not

have intercommunion, a state of affairs that has lasted ever since the Free Churches were established and built their own chapels and meeting-halls. This custom can only be defended from the Free Churches' point of view so long as the National Church is considered un-Christian, but now that the Free Churches begin to share the ecumenical views and to feel the wish that the communion table should be open to all, the Free Churchmen will find themselves confronted with a profound question of principle.

In opposition to certain ways of thinking in the National Church, which place great emphasis on the clerical ministry in the Lutheran Church in contradistinction to the Free Churches, Professor Wingren maintains that there is no basis for such ideas either in the confession or in the Bible. Hence there is no reason for setting aside the Free Churches' administration of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. Nor can this be done on the ground of doctrine, as there are actually larger divergencies of doctrine within the National Church, than there are between the National Church and the non-Baptist Free Churches.

Professor Wingren feels that on this basis the relation between the National Church and the Free Churches should be re-examined. The chief emphasis must here be placed on the individual congregations, not on the churches as a whole, and the problem will probably have to be solved in various ways in various parts of the country according to local conditions.

The Professor closes by pointing out the great task awaiting the National Church as well as the Free Churches, especially in the suburbs of the big cities where most of the inhabitants live with little or no personal connection with the Church. He feels that the massive opposition of the big cities may perhaps open the way to an entirely new relationship between the National Church and the Free Churches.

Svenska Missionsförbundet (Mission Covenant Church of Sweden), the largest Free Church organization, has published its comments in a leading article in its paper "Svensk Veckotidning". It is stated here that the background for the establishment of the Free Churches was the conviction that the congregation ought to be a congregation of believers, and not a 'territorial congregation' of both believers and unbelievers. This is still a fundamental viewpoint. There is, to be sure, an ecumenical feeling toward the National Church, but to most Free Churchmen this does not mean that they recognize it as a true church, though they are willing to accept it as an instrument of the Gospel. But if there is any question of a united church and if we are to join it, it must be a "fellowship of the saints and true believers".

What Can a National Church Demand of the State?

The relation between State and Church is at present being eagerly discussed in Sweden, and one of the most noteworthy and lucid contributions is an article in "Svenska Dagbladet" by Bishop John Cullberg, Västerås. In the article he defines

certain necessary conditions for good relations between the two entities.

In the first place, the State must in no way restrict the spiritual freedom of the Church, and it must support the Church in such a way that it will have favourable conditions under which to carry out its spiritual task. And secondly, the State must ensure law and order. For according to the fundamental views of the Church this is the proper task of the State. If power is put above right, and that may even happen in the so-called welfare-state - the State becomes a demon, and the Church cannot co-operate with a demon.

The Church can co-operate with any ruling constellation of power with one exception: the totalitarian state, whether it is concealed behind a Nazi, a Communist, or a degenerate democratic disguise. The reason is that a totalitarian power does not fulfil the two conditions mentioned above. Its ideology causes it to demand the supremacy over man's spiritual life as well, and hence it cannot give the Church liberty to carry on its work. And as totalitarian ideologies claim that the law is subject to the State (cp. the people's tribunals) it is not a state governed by law. Of course it is possible for the Church to exist in a totalitarian state, but any co-operation based on confidence is impossible, if the Church desires to remain a Church and not to be isolated in a "liturgical ghetto" or be transformed into an organ for the state's cultural propaganda.

The Bishop goes on to discuss whether the conditions necessary for co-operation between State and Church are present in Sweden to-day and comes to the conclusion that they are. There can be no doubt as to Sweden's being a state governed by law, and as to the spiritual freedom of the Church there has so far been no great reason for complaining that the State has circumscribed it.

But at the same time Bishop Cullberg indicates the existence of certain dangerous trends pointing toward a totalitarian state. The guiding star of Swedish politics is a socialized society with a centralized government in which the State takes care of the individual from birth to death through state contributions, public aid, insurances, and pensions. The state propagandizes effectively for a certain way of life, if not a certain religion, the god of which is the standard of living. And at the same time Swedish democracy is increasingly becoming biased against Christian inspiration which is considered unimportant, perhaps even harmful.

The Bishop also voices his concern that the State has been so chary in giving permission for the erection of new churches, and that the State authorities do not seem to realize the necessity of the Church being allowed to expand its work through an increasing number of clergymen in the growing cities.

In summing up, the Bishop writes that so far nothing has made the Church think it necessary to take the initiative in bringing about a separation between Church and State. But on

the other hand there are certain tendencies in the state that may make this a burning problem sooner than people think. Hence there is reason for the Church to increase its watchfulness and preparedness more than ever.

Parting of Parishes in Stockholm.

One of the biggest problems in the Swedish National Church, to which leading churchmen have again and again called the attention of the public opinion are the large parishes in Stockholm. This problem will be solved for the present. The government namely has decided to divide the two biggest parishes Brännkyrka and Enskede, which have 258.000 members together, into 6 parishes. The biggest of these will have an area with some more than 65.000 inhabitants, and the smallest one nearly 25.000 inhabitants. The parting will be effective from January 1st, 1957. Already now it is foreseen that the two biggest parishes in a reasonably near future will be divided again.

Shortened Theological Training Refused by Parliament.

The proposal that a shortened training course for the ministry of the Swedish National Church should be arranged in order to meet the serious lack of trained clergymen (cp. CN No. 4) has been refused by Parliament. In the debate it was stressed that it was not desirable to reduce the university training for part of the clergy.

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Erratum.

In our edition No. 6 of May 27th, page 2, there is a misprint in line 6 that may mislead to the impression that the Danish Church acknowledges abortion for race reasons. This is naturally not the case. The sentence should read: "The statement expresses the Church's point of view, that abortion should only be legal for medical, ethical.(rape), and eugenic (seriously defective children) reasons."

CHURCH NEWS FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES
Sigtuna, Sweden.